

In brief

Briton ends his life at assisted suicide clinic: A British man with motor neurone disease ended his life this week at an assisted suicide clinic in Switzerland. Reginald Crew, aged 74, a retired car worker from Liverpool, whose last day was filmed for broadcast on the television programme *Tonight with Trevor McDonald*, is thought to be the second person from the United Kingdom to die with the help of Dignitas, an organisation that aids people in committing suicide.

Doctors in Zimbabwe set up human rights group: A group of doctors in Zimbabwe has set up the Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZADHR). The association will campaign for the observance of the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and will bring the skills of the medical profession to the aid of victims of human rights abuses. The association can be contacted at ZADHR@healthnet.zw

One in three women stopped HRT after trial halted: Of 65 031 US women taking combined oestrogen and progestogen therapy through a large US prescription plan, 36% stopped taking the combination after the Women's Health Initiative stopped its trial (*BMJ* 2002;325:61). Seven per cent switched to another medication and 57% continued taking oestrogens. The rate of discontinuation of combination medication was about four times higher than before the trial was terminated.

Choice narrows in race for director general of WHO: The World Health Organization's executive board shortlisted five candidates for the post of director general this week. They are Dr Julio Frenk, Mexico; Dr Jong Wook Lee, Republic of Korea; Dr Pascoal Manuel Mocumbi, Mozambique; Dr Peter Piot, Belgium; and Professor Ismail Sallam, Egypt. The board will pick one of these candidates as director general elect next week. Full story in News Extra at bmj.com

Paediatrician calls for shake up in handling child abuse cases

Lynn Eaton *London*

A radical shake up is needed in the way child protection cases are tackled, with a harder line being taken when professionals suspect premeditated abuse, argue UK paediatricians in two articles in the latest issue of *Archives of Disease in Childhood* (2003;88:101-4, 105-7).

The authors of the two papers are consultant paediatricians Professor David Southall and Dr Martin Samuels of North

Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent, and Michael Golden, emeritus professor of medicine, University of Aberdeen.

Professor Southall and Dr Samuels attracted controversy when they were suspended in 1999 following allegations that they conducted a clinical trial on children without parental consent. They were also accused of harassing parents whom they suspected of child abuse (*BMJ* 2001;323:885). They were reinstated in 2001 after an inquiry found that the allegations were unjustified (*BMJ* 2002;325:1054).

In the two articles Professor Southall and colleagues propose that instead of the current arrangement, whereby multidisciplinary child protection teams handle all cases of alleged child abuse, and social workers are trained to work with the parents, there needs to be a tougher approach to handling cases where there is suspicion of deliberate, premeditated child abuse by the parent or carer for gain.

They propose a new, three point classification of suspected child abuse cases:

- Category A: deliberate, premeditated child abuse undertaken for gain (where the abuser enjoys inflicting pain)
- Category B: impulsive ill treatment resulting from adverse societal and personal pressures (where a parent is under great stress and lacks support)
- Category C: mild ill treatment universal in all societies (such as smacking a badly behaved child).

All suspected category A cases should be handled by a newly established special inter-agency task force led by the police, say the authors. Parents suspected of category B child abuse would be referred to the more traditional child protection team. Category C abuse should be tackled through education.

Professor Southall told the *BMJ* that the report into the death of Victoria Climbié (which is currently with ministers) is just one example of how the current arrangements are failing children whose carers are deliberately harming them.

Working with parents in the category A group had proved incredibly difficult for professionals. Professor Southall said: "These people are very threatening. One of the ways they manage to succeed is to frighten professionals." □



Victoria Climbié: the inquiry into her death is with ministers

PA PHOTOS

Police uncover large scale organ trafficking in Punjab

Sanjay Kumar *New Delhi*

The police in Amritsar city in Punjab state, northern India, have unearthed what they call "the mother of all scandals in human organ trafficking in India."

The police have arrested several doctors, middlemen, and donors, including the alleged main player—transplant surgeon Dr Parveen Kumar Sareen, who works for Kakkar Hospital, which is run by a private charitable trust. Also arrested was Dr O P Mahajan, principal of the Government Medical College and chairman of the authorisation committee that certifies that no commercial transaction has taken place.

Police officials believe that 1.5 billion rupees (£19.4m; \$31.4m; €29.4m) changed hands between the doctors, middlemen, and the donors from 1997 to 2002.

The Transplantation of Human Organs Act 1994 allows donation of organs between relatives but prohibits any monetary benefits to the donor. It also allows donation of organs (also without monetary benefit) between unrelated donors if this arises from love and affection for the patient. "It is this clause which was exploited by the racketeers to make millions," said Satish Kumar Sharma, inspector general of police in Jalandhar.

Between half a million and a million rupees were charged for each kidney transplant, Mr Sharma told the *BMJ*. Whereas doctors and middlemen cornered the major share of the money, the donors—mainly poor migrant labourers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar states—were

given only 25 000 rupees (£324; \$523; €490) to 50 000 rupees.

Since 1995, 2384 kidney transplant procedures took place in Punjab, of which 1972 cases were approved in Amritsar. "Of these, 1522 procedures took place at the Kakkar Hospital," said Mr Sharma.

"The 'donors' were not even given proper postoperative care, and in some cases were threatened with imprisonment for the illegal act and thrown out of hospital a week after the transplant," he said. He confirmed the deaths of six labourers as a result, although the numbers could be much higher, he added.

The police are investigating 400 such cases but have said that most of the addresses of donors and recipients in the records are fake. The police claim to have seized signed authorisation certificates at Kakkar Hospital, where Dr Sareen works. □